

**Joint decisions promoting student engagement
in the primary foreign language classroom**

Versão corrigida e melhorada após defesa pública

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**Relatório de Estágio de Mestrado em Ensino de Inglês
no 1º Ciclo do Ensino Básico**

June, 2020

Relatório de Estágio apresentado para cumprimento dos requisitos necessários à obtenção do grau de Mestre em Mestrado em ensino de inglês no 1º ciclo do ensino básico, realizado sob a orientação científica de Professora Doutora Carolyn Leslie e de Professora Doutora Ana Matos.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to Professor Ana Matos, who made this MA degree possible for me back in 2018.

I thank Paula Katchi for supervising my practicum and teaching me how to be a better teacher. Her encouragement and feedback was essential for my growth as a teacher.

My thanks the school where I carried out my practicum for being so welcoming, and to the wonderful students who participated in this research and who I will never forget.

I am grateful to Professor Carolyn Leslie for taking the time to help me with my final report and guiding me throughout my teacher training. Thanks to her I have truly learnt the value of reflection in teaching.

I am thankful to my dear family, who have shown immense support despite the distance.

Finally, I thank Manuel for being a pillar of strength throughout my MA degree and much more.

JOINT DECISIONS PROMOTING STUDENT ENGAGEMENT IN THE PRIMARY FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

VANESSA VALKAMA

ABSTRACT

Keywords: student engagement, student choice, autonomy support, primary school, foreign language

The objective of this action research project was to discover how to engage students more in the primary English foreign language classroom by including them in decision-making processes. Therefore, the research question was, “How does joint decision-making affect student engagement in the primary foreign language classroom?” In order to determine the answer, I performed a small-scale action research project as a teacher trainee, where students were allowed to choose what type of activity we did to learn a certain topic in class once every week, using a questionnaire, observation grid and teacher’s journal to collect data on their emotional and behavioural engagement. I chose to focus on emotional and behavioural engagement because in my teaching experience, I have observed first hand when a student is emotionally and behaviourally engaged, it reduces the amount of undesirable behaviour that would normally lead to disruption in the classroom and negatively impact students’ academic achievement and mental well-being. Thus, the possibility of student choice increasing emotional and behavioural student engagement would be a positive outcome of the action research for both the students and the teacher. Although there were not many notable contrasts in the data collected using all three research instruments, possibly due to the initial high engagement of the students, higher levels of participation were evident after or while student choice was taking place. The results revealed that there were more differences in behavioural engagement than students’ emotional engagement, which allowed a conclusion to be formed that involving the students in decision-making in the classroom may have been a reason for the increase in their engaged behaviour. A possible explanation for the increase in behavioural engagement rather than emotional engagement may be that behavioural engagement was more observable than emotional engagement, and the fact that the students were initially more highly emotionally engaged than behaviourally engaged, thus not demonstrating great changes. Overall, as an outcome of this research, I discovered that the more open and inclusive I was with my students, the more they also opened up to me, which made them more engaged. Therefore, not only did this research encourage me to gain more knowledge about the topic, but as a teacher trainee it also motivated me to develop my classroom into an increasingly engaging and student-centred environment.

DECISÕES COMUNS PROMOVENDO A INCLUSÃO DO ESTUDANTE NA SALA DE AULA PRIMÁRIA DA LÍNGUA ENSTRANGEIRA

VANESSA VALKAMA

RESUMO

Palavras-chave: empenho do aluno, escolha do aluno, suporte à autonomia, escola primaria, lingua estrangeira

O objetivo desta ação de pesquisa foi descobrir como envolver mais os alunos do ensino primário de Inglês como língua estrangeira, incluindo-os nos processos de decisão. Assim sendo, a questão da pesquisa foi: “Como é que o processo de tomada de decisões conjunta afeta o empenho dos alunos na sala de aula primária do ensino de Inglês como língua estrangeira?” De modo a determinar a resposta, fiz uma ação de pesquisa de pequena escala. Trabalhei como professora estagiária, num ambiente onde foi permitido aos alunos escolher que tipo de atividade se fazia para aprender um determinado tópico em aula, uma vez por semana. Os dados da pesquisa acerca do envolvimento emocional e comportamental dos alunos foram recolhidos sob a forma de questionários, tabelas de observação e um diário de professor. Escolhi focar-me no envolvimento emocional e comportamental porque, na minha experiência enquanto professora, observei em primeira mão que quando um estudante está emocionalmente e comportamentalmente envolvido, isso reduz a quantidade de comportamentos indesejáveis que normalmente levariam a perturbações na sala de aula e afetariam negativamente o desempenho académico e bem-estar mental dos outros alunos. Assim, a possibilidade de escolhas dos alunos aumentarem o seu envolvimento emocional e comportamental, seria um resultado positivo da ação de pesquisa para os alunos e para o professor. Embora não sejam apresentados muitos contrastes notáveis nos dados recolhidos usando os três instrumentos de pesquisa, possivelmente devido ao elevado empenho inicial dos alunos, níveis mais altos de participação eram evidentes após ou enquanto a escolha dos estudantes ocorria. Os resultados revelaram que havia mais diferenças no envolvimento comportamental do que o envolvimento emocional dos alunos, o que permitiu concluir que a inclusão dos alunos na tomada de decisões em sala de aula pode ter sido uma razão para o aumento de um comportamento mais envolvido. Uma possível explicação para o aumento do envolvimento comportamental em vez de emocional, poderá ser o facto do primeiro ser mais observável que o envolvimento emocional e o facto dos estudantes terem estado logo desde o início mais envolvidos emocionalmente do que comportamentalmente, não mostrando assim grandes mudanças a nível emocional. No geral, como resultado desta pesquisa, descobri que quanto mais aberta e inclusiva eu era com meus alunos, mais eles também se abriam para mim, o que os tornava mais envolvidos. Portanto, esta pesquisa não só me incentivou a adquirir mais conhecimento sobre o tema, como também me motivou enquanto estagiária a transformar a minha sala de aula num ambiente cada vez mais envolvente e centrado no aluno.

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Introduction

Fostering a close relationship with students in a primary foreign language class that you teach only once or twice a week can be difficult, but is something that is very important to me as a teacher. I believe that the closer the student and teacher are emotionally, the more engaged, meaning the more behaviourally, emotionally and cognitively involved in school (Skinner, Kindermann, and Furrer, 2009), the student will be. This has also been proven in previous research, such as that of Heise & Himes (2010), which shows that one way of engaging students is by creating a more student-centered classroom and involving students in decision-making processes. As a child, I used to naturally feel interested in activities that I was able to choose myself, and this is a feeling that I trust follows many into adulthood. The more control we have in making decisions for ourselves, the more involved we usually are in the processes concerned.

I consider that the more engaged the students are, the more successful in school and happier they will be. In fact, the literature has proven that engaging young learners by giving them more responsibility and freedom to choose also encourages learner autonomy, which in turn leads to positive attitudes towards learning and academic achievement (Stefanou, Perencevich, DiCintio, & Turner, 2004). Furthermore, what if engagement through student choice could not only benefit students academically, but also positively impact their emotional and behavioural development? Considering this possibility, creating a classroom environment that encourages learner autonomy, which could encourage student engagement, would be an ideal situation for any foreign language teacher who wishes to build a positive relationship with their students and wishes to see them thrive. I say this, because during my time as a teacher, I have observed first hand that student engagement reduces the amount of undesirable behaviour that would normally lead to disruption in the classroom and negatively impact students' academic achievement and mental well-being. Furthermore, in my experience, teachers are given a great opportunity and responsibility to be able to impact young learners' development and educate them not only in specific subject areas, in this case the English language, but also to be independent thinkers and socially and emotionally aware individuals. Therefore, I would like to be a teacher who listens to students and allows them to express their opinions when appropriate, and I believe

it is important to create new tools for them to be able to do so, which is why I chose this topic for my research.

Thus, my objective is to discover how to engage students more in the primary English foreign language classroom by including them in decision-making processes. There are various possible ways to do this, which are perhaps already familiar to many teachers, such as letting students make the classroom rules together, choosing their own partners for an activity, or by selecting a topic for a project to work on. However, in this action research, I involved the students by allowing them to choose what type of activity we did to learn a certain topic in class once every week. Through this, I strived to discover how joint decision-making affects student engagement in the primary foreign language classroom, or whether in fact, it has an effect on their engagement overall. Therefore, my research question was, how does joint decision-making affect student engagement in the primary foreign language classroom?

Before answering this question, it is firstly important to understand what engagement means and what it entails in order to define the criteria that is being used in this research, which will be discussed in the first section of the literature review. In addition, a definition of autonomy support and an overview on its impact on engagement will be provided in section 2, and lastly, a brief overview of previous literature related to the topics will be provided in section 3, along with conclusions of the literature in section 4 of the first chapter. After these key terms have been defined, it will be possible to discuss the context and methodology of the research in chapter 2, sections 1 and 2, from which the data will then be analysed in section 3. Finally, conclusions based on the results will be formed in section 4, in order to discover how student engagement was affected through my practice of encouraging student choice and joint decision-making in the English foreign language classroom.

1. Literature review

Although literature on student engagement and its effects on academic performance can be found, research rarely focuses on achieving engagement as a goal itself (Bender, 2017). As a result, research on strategies to achieve student engagement is particularly limited in the field of foreign language teaching for young learners. Therefore, this literature review will cover research related to learner autonomy, in order to discover whether it can be used to promote student engagement in the foreign language classroom.

1.1. Student engagement

In order to define engagement for the purposes of this research, a distinction between engagement and motivation is first worth establishing, since the two concepts may be difficult to distinguish from one another. Research has defined engagement as “the outward manifestation of a motivated student”, and “the quality of a student’s connection or involvement with the endeavor of schooling and hence with the people, activities, goals, values, and place that compose it” (Skinner et al. 2009, p. 494). Thus, motivation can be viewed as the inner feeling that promotes engagement and may be harder to measure, whereas engagement itself is the outcome of motivation and may be easier to observe.

A distinction can also be made between engagement and its opposite, which is defined differently by researchers, using terms such as “alienation” (Mann, 2001, p. 7) and “inertia, apathy, disillusionment or engagement in other pursuits” (Krause, 2005, p. 4). Skinner et al. (2009) refer to the antithesis of engagement as disaffection or disengagement, and just like engagement, disengagement can be viewed from the behavioural, emotional and cognitive perspective, although the latter will not be discussed here. Passivity, and lack of effort and persistence are considered disengaged behaviours, and disengaged emotions include feelings of anxiety, frustration, boredom and sadness, for example (Skinner et al. 2009). Skinner et al. (2009) also state that being physically present in the classroom or having an emotional attachment to the school is not the same as being engaged, as the student must be both behaviourally and emotionally engaged with the content that they are learning. Trowler (2010), also states

that engagement does not mean merely being participative, and emphasises the significance of the three dimensions, which are behavioural, emotional and cognitive engagement. Although all three dimensions can be interconnected, this study will not include cognitive engagement, which signifies the learners' psychological investment in learning (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris, 2004). Thus, it is important to define behavioural and emotional student engagement, as they will be the main focus here.

Behavioural engagement can be visible in student behaviour as outward effort and persistence, as well as mental effort, which affects the students' attentiveness and concentration in class, shown as on-task behaviour, for example (Skinner et al., 2009). Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris (2004) also propose that a behaviourally engaged student follows the rules by being positively involved in school, and does not demonstrate problematic behaviour. Emotional engagement, on the other hand, is indicated by the students through enthusiasm, interest and enjoyment and a sense of belonging (Fredricks et al., 2004, and Skinner et al., 2009). Trowler (2010) suggests that all dimensions of engagement can be viewed on a scale from positive to negative engagement, separated into categories of positive engagement, non-engagement and negative engagement, which is similar to the comparison between engagement and disengagement made by Skinner et al. (2009).

1.2. Autonomy support

In order to discover whether involving students in decision-making can promote engagement, this section will focus on the possible outcome of creating a classroom environment conducive to learner autonomy. Firstly, however, we must establish a definition for learner autonomy, which can be applied to the foreign language context. Holec (1981), in his research on student autonomy and foreign language learning, provides some fundamental definitions of learner autonomy, which describe the phenomena as the ability to assume responsibility for one's own learning and taking initiative to plan and carry out learning activities. Although defining learner autonomy can also cause confusion due to being mistaken for self-instruction, it is widely agreed that autonomous learning refers to students' pro-activity in the classroom (Little, 2003). In a more recent study related to the impact of student-centered instruction on EFL

learners' affect and achievement, Kassem (2019) also emphasises that learner autonomy involves the ability to make independent decisions based on the skill of choosing the most appropriate option out of the alternatives, and being accountable for the choices that one makes.

To do so in a primary classroom environment, however, autonomy support is needed. Autonomy support, according to Black and Deci (2000, p. 742), refers to a person of authority, such as a teacher, adopting the students' perspective and being able to recognize their feelings and arrange "opportunities for choice, while minimizing the use of pressures and demands". In other words, a teacher must provide an open space where students can be involved in decision-making, while giving them the support necessary to make their own choices. Previous research, such as Deci, Nezlek, and Sheinman (1981), Flink, Boggiano, and Barrett (1990) Ryan and Grolnick (1986) have proven that autonomy support has a positive impact on students' motivation and achievement. Furthermore, recently many studies such as Hospel and Galand (2016), Jang, Reeve, and Deci (2010), and Vansteenkiste, Sierens, Goossens, Soenens, Dochy, Mouratidis, Aelterman, Haerens and Beyers, (2012) have suggested that high autonomy support has a direct, positive correlation to student engagement, although mostly in upper school contexts. Thus, teachers should create a student-centered environment in the classroom by being understanding and open to students' opinions (Stefanou et al., 2004), since teachers who provide low autonomy support with controlling and suppressive behaviour may lead their students to disengagement (Reeve, Jang, Carrell, Jeon and Barch, 2004). In order for teachers to do this, Stefanou et al. (2004, p. 97) propose three different ways that autonomy support can be applied in the classroom. These are,

1. Organizational autonomy support, such as allowing the students to make some decisions over classroom management.
2. Procedural autonomy support, such as providing the opportunity for students to choose from different types of media to present ideas.
3. Cognitive autonomy support, such as giving students the tools to self-evaluate their work.

In accordance with cognitive autonomy support, the importance of making meaningful choices must be noted. Both Stefanou et al. (2004) and Anderson (2016) emphasise that choice should always be used with a purpose, and teachers should be aware of this whilst providing students with choices. Choices must also be related to the curricula and the students' needs in addition to their interests (Anderson, 2016).

1.3. Relevant empirical research

In recent years, the correlation between student autonomy and engagement has been studied in a primary school context in research carried out in Estonia (Näkk and Timoštšuk 2017). The purpose of Näkk and Timoštšuk's (2017) study was to research the impact of teacher's classroom practices, particularly general autonomy support, on students' behavioural, emotional and cognitive engagement over two years in primary school. Näkk and Timoštšuk (2017) used student engagement questionnaires and observation sheets as methods to collect data on 2nd and 4th grade students of two teachers, a highly autonomy-supportive Estonian language teacher and a low autonomy-supportive science teacher, as well as the teachers themselves. The discoveries of the research were that the primary students were generally highly engaged, and contrary to expectations, they were not significantly less engaged in the classes with the teacher who used low autonomy-support. However, possible explanations for the results were the influence of other factors, such as social context and classroom variables, as well as both teachers finding different ways of engaging their students, regardless of their level of autonomy support. Thus, Näkk and Timoštšuk (2017) propose that further studies on these aspects of influence be made.

In addition to Näkk and Timoštšuk (2017), a study by Skinner et al. (2009) provides an appropriate model for researching student engagement with similar methods. Skinner et al. (2009) analysed the correlation of results between engagement questionnaires distributed to both teachers and students, with observations of engagement in the classroom, in order to discover the validity of using these methods to measure components of behavioural and emotional engagement. To accomplish this, they divided engagement into four indicators: engaged behaviour, meaning "on-task behaviour, academic behaviour and class participation" (Skinner et al., 2009, p. 495),

engaged emotion, meaning emotions that “reflect energized emotional states” (Skinner et al., 2009, p. 495), disaffected behaviour, reflected as “passivity, lack of initiation, lack of effort, and giving up” (Skinner et al., 2009, p. 495) and disaffected emotion, which includes emotions such as boredom, frustration and anxiety. These researchers performed their research in relation to all school subjects on 1018 students from grades 3 to 6, who were predominantly Caucasian. Their results confirmed expectations that individual factors were strongly related to the students’ engagement in the classroom. Furthermore, they claimed that student profiles, such as a “behaviourally engaged but emotionally disaffected” (Skinner et al., 2009, p. 518) child could be distinguished with the help of the results, which could help provide a more complete understanding of the multidimensional aspect of student engagement. Thus, their findings suggested that when measuring engagement and disaffection, various dimensions, such as students’ personal qualities, must be considered to influence the four indicators used in their study. Nevertheless, Skinner et al. (2009) declared that their model to assess student engagement serves as a foundation for future research.

1.4. Conclusion

Since it is evident that student engagement comprises good behaviour and positive emotions, engagement should be considered a goal in teaching. Furthermore, since research has discovered that autonomy support can be used to encourage student engagement, it should be considered a useful tool in education. Therefore, student choice as a form of procedural autonomy support (Stefanou et al., 2004) and its possibilities to promote student engagement require further study.

2. Action research

Similar to the study conducted by Skinner et al. (2009), my research examines the behavioural and emotional engagement of students, by additionally taking into consideration the variable of student choice. I also used similar methods of collecting data to Näkk and Timoštšuk (2017) and Skinner et al. (2009), including an engagement questionnaire and classroom observation, which will be discussed in this section.

Initially, however, I will describe the context in which this action research was conducted. I will then present the methodology and research tools used to collect the data. Lastly, I will analyse and interpret the results of my research, and form conclusions based on the evidence.

2.1 Context

Firstly, it is important to consider the target group and setting of my investigation. The action research took place in a rural-suburban, private Portuguese primary school with one class per grade, each consisting of fewer than 20 students. My assigned class was the 3rd grade, which consisted of 13 students aged 8 to 9, out of which 5 were boys and 8 were girls, with predominantly middle class backgrounds. I taught them English for two hours a week over the duration of three and a half months from September to December. The first language, or L1, of all the students was Portuguese, and the majority had a beginner or elementary level of English, or A1/2 (Council of Europe, 2011), which they were learning as a foreign language. There were some exceptions, however, as there was a student whose grandmother was from England with a higher proficiency in the language, and two students with special educational needs, whose competence was lower than the average.

The differences in the students' English skills would be apparent at times. Tests had to be adapted for students with special educational needs, and the student with an English background helped other students who were having trouble with the language at times, for example. Visual help on the board as well as audio support was also provided to help students, but since the school had a traditional approach to teaching,

there was limited possibility to utilize technology in class. Thus, there was often a need for personal attention and differentiated activities among the students.

Nonetheless, the class was very calm and attentive in general. My classroom management was simple and effective, since the students were respectful to the teacher and one another, which also made a more democratic approach to teaching possible. Some reasons for their good behaviour may have been their age, the small size of the class and school, as well as the authoritarian influence of their classroom teacher, who was present during most of the lessons, though not interfering and working quietly at the back of the classroom. Overall, the classroom environment was peaceful and productive.

2.2 Methodology

This subsection will define some of the features of action research and explain how the research tools, which included a student questionnaire, observation grid and teacher's journal, were used.

2.2.1 *Action research*

As this research was performed systematically in a classroom environment for the purpose of gathering information about the students' behavioural and emotional engagement, it is considered an action research project (Mills, 2011). According to Burns (2010), action research is not only self-reflective and critical, but a systematic approach must be applied in the teaching context. Burns (2010) also notes the role of the teacher as an investigator of their own teaching environment. Thus, in this action research, I took on the role of an investigator to find the answer to my research question by collecting and analyzing data. Before addressing the research tools used in my investigation, it is worth defining some of the key aspects of action research.

Firstly, the research was divided into 4 stages (Mertler and Charles, 2011). The first stage was the planning stage, in which I planned and prepared all the materials for the action research, which included the questionnaire (Appendix A) and observation grid (Appendix B), as well as the choice board (Appendix C) to use in the classroom. This took place in early September, when I also informed the students, parents and school director

of the action research by distributing consent letters (see Appendix D, E and F). Gaining consent to conduct the research had to be done with particular caution, since it involved minors. Therefore, it was made clear that the students' participation was voluntary and anonymous (Burns, 2010), and all responses to carry out the action research were affirmative.

Once I had gathered all the necessary consent, I was able to proceed to the acting stage (Mertler and Charles, 2011) in October, which lasted until early December. During this stage, I gave the students the engagement questionnaires and throughout the stage I observed the students while practicing joint decision-making in the classroom. Since my focus was on procedural autonomy support, it involved encouraging the students to choose how to carry out an assignment or study a topic by selecting the execution of one classroom task each week with the help of a choice board that provided different ideas, such as games, music, art, acting, doing a poster or a presentation. Thus, the purpose was to have the students choose the medium of the activity, rather than the content of the activity. For example, if the contents of the following class involved reading, the students could choose to carry out the activity by having a story time, acting out the story, or even through a game. In fact, all three of these methods were used in relation to a text from the students' coursebooks. The first time, the students wanted it to be read to them as a story, and I used story cards to present it to them (Appendix G). The next time, they voted that they wanted to play a game, and I created a matching game where they had to use their reading comprehension skills to find information from the text as well as question words that we had been practising for grammar (Appendix H). Finally, they chose to act out the story as a drama, and I created a screenplay which the students then presented to me (Appendix I). Other examples of the activities chosen by the students were a song for Halloween, in which I incorporated the topic of emotions that we had been learning about (Appendix J) and arts and crafts for Thanksgiving (Appendix K), for which they created paper turkeys to express what they were thankful for. The selection of the activities was done in a democratic fashion, through discussion and voting. Once a week, five minutes at the end of the lesson was set aside for this to take place.

The third stage, which is called the developing stage according to Mertler & Charles (2011), started in December after the students had completed the same questionnaire that they did at the beginning of the term a second time. After this, I was able to assemble the data that I had collected from the questionnaires and observations and begin analyzing the data. Finally, in February, I was able to conduct the reflecting stage of my action research, where I carefully reflected on the results received from the comparison of data, and considered their implications in order to gain full understanding of the outcome.

2.2.2 Engagement questionnaire

To collect quantitative data of the students' engagement, I used an engagement questionnaire (Appendix A) adapted from Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris (2004), and Skinner et al. (2009 pp. 519-521), which had proven to be a successful tool in their engagement research. The engagement questionnaire was given to the children once at the beginning of the semester in October and again at the end of the semester in December, after which the data from both could be compared.

The questionnaire was divided into three parts: behavioural engagement, which consisted of statements related to their on-task behaviour in class, emotional engagement, with statements associated with their feelings of interest and enjoyment in class, and student choice, including statements about their level of participation in decision-making in class and how they felt about it. Each part consisted of four statements that were presented in both Portuguese and English, and could be answered on a 1-4 point scale, 1 representing "Never", 2 "Rarely", 3 "Often" and 4 "Always", similar to the scale used by Skinner et al. (2009). This scale was chosen to be simpler for the young students with not too many options to confuse them, and to eliminate the possibility of always choosing the middle answer had they been presented with an odd numbers of options. A pilot questionnaire was also given to the students beforehand, which revealed that it was necessary to make alterations to the statements due to misunderstandings. It was also essential to assist the children by reading through the questions and clarifying any doubts to reduce the possibility of any further confusions. After carrying out both questionnaires, I was able to create a table to compare the data

from the results between the two, which is expressed in percentages as well as numbers of students.

My choice to use an engagement questionnaire to collect data is not only justified by the effective previous use of a similar questionnaire conducted by Skinner et al. (2009), but also because it could provide the behavioural and attitudinal data desired for this action research (Dörnyei, 2003). The advantages of using a questionnaire also had a great influence on the selection of this tool to collect data, as they are relatively easy to administer and analyse (Dörnyei, 2003). Nonetheless, the disadvantages of using a questionnaire were also taken into consideration, especially regarding unreliable responses, which were evident during the process of analyzing the data.

2.2.3 Observation grid

After implementing my method of classroom choice, it was possible to begin observing the students' engagement. To document my observations in class, I used a classroom observation grid as my primary tool. I chose to use this research tool because observation is a central part of action research, and since the questionnaire's reliability may have been questionable, it was necessary to use another quantitative research tool to either strengthen or contradict results. I also wanted to identify how the students' behaviour may have differed during activities related to student choice and those activities that were not, as this was not evidently present in the questionnaire. Therefore, observation could provide a more realistic understanding of the classroom environment and students.

It was important to systematize observation by finding a focus and documenting the findings, in addition to being reflective in the analysis. The classroom observation grid, presented in Appendix B, was based on three categories used by Skinner et al. (2009, p. 503) to capture children's on-task behaviour and three categories to document children's off-task behaviour, which are,

1. On-Task Active Initiative, such as a child participating in the lesson by raising his or her hand or volunteering to do a task

2. On-Task Working, such as working on an assigned activity or responding to questions
3. On-Task Passive, such as careful listening during teaching
4. Off-Task Initiative, such as disruptive behaviour
5. Off-Task Working, such as doing an activity of their own while the teacher is talking
6. Off-Task Passive Behavior, such as not listening to what the teacher is saying

Due to the small size of the class, it was possible to observe all children at once by ticking the boxes of the categories of behaviour next to their names. The other side of the observation grid also included a table for any extra comments of a specific child relating to their behaviour and engagement. I used the observation grids in every lesson if possible, although lack of time and unforeseen circumstances would prevent it at times, even though the cooperating teacher also assisted by filling in observation grids whenever I was incapable of observing the students. Nonetheless, the aim was to complete two observation grids weekly, one in a lesson during the time when student choice or an activity chosen by the students was taking place, and another in a lesson during an activity which the students had not chosen themselves to have a point of comparison. Altogether, it was possible to gather 10 observation grids with sufficient data to investigate. From those observation grids, 5 were completed while observing situations relating to student choice, and the other 5 during activities that were not associated with student choice. In order to summarise the data, but at the same time demonstrate that there may be some variability within the values, the average results from both were then calculated and displayed as percentages in a table for comparison.

2.2.4 Teacher's journal

The use of a teacher's journal provided the opportunity for further critical reflection on the observations made in class. It also served to record experiences or significant details that may have seemed out of the usual or otherwise been forgotten (Moon, 2006), which is why I chose to use it in addition to the questionnaire and observation grid. Thus, the journal was a compilation of short notes, paragraphs and quotes that the students may have said in class that day that could be related to their emotional and behavioural engagement. Furthermore, I was able to record students' answers to questions related

to the results of the questionnaires and my observations, which gave further insight into the reasons behind the outcomes.

Informal observations for the teacher's journal were made in every class and recorded into the journal after the lesson as quotes from the students or descriptions of their behaviour. I first collected the data from the questionnaires and observation grids, then used the journal as a reference to fit in any missing pieces or give additional information. Therefore, the data from the teacher's journal was qualitative and more informal, and is presented as excerpts from notes or quotations from children. Some of the information from the teacher's journal even served as an explanation for the discoveries made in the questionnaires and observation grids, as it included free speech from the students and observations that could be linked to a pattern of behaviour apparent in the other data collection tools.

2.2.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, a questionnaire, observation grid and teacher's journal were chosen as the data collection tools to suit a small-scale action research project conducted by a primary FL teacher. The choice of these three different research tools allowed the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data, which could help provide a more versatile understanding of the results of the research. However, the risk of gathering unreliable data was possible when observing, since it can be subjective and misjudgements can be made, as well as in the questionnaires, where there is a possibility of misunderstandings and undependable answers. Therefore, when analysing the data in the following section, a critical awareness of the possible flaws in the methodologies used was adopted.

2.3 Results

In order to discover the answer to my research question, “How does joint decision-making affect student engagement in the primary foreign language classroom?”, I analysed the results of the data both quantitatively and qualitatively, as mentioned previously in the methodology section. I will begin by describing the data collected from my student engagement questionnaires, starting from the questionnaire first given to the students at the beginning of the term and subsequently the questionnaire given at the end of the term. After this, I will compare the findings between the two. I will then do a similar quantitative analysis of the results from the observation and finally, I will discuss the data collected from the teacher’s journals to determine what patterns emerge and how the qualitative data can be related to the preceding information found from the questionnaires and observation grids and my research question.

2.3.1. *Engagement questionnaire results*

This section will start by presenting the results from the first engagement questionnaire that was given to the students. Subsequently, the results from the second time the engagement questionnaire carried out will be presented and compared to the outcome of the first questionnaire. Lastly, a conclusion will be made of the findings.

2.3.1.1. *Results from the first engagement questionnaire*

The purpose of the questionnaire was to collect quantitative data of the students’ behavioural and emotional engagement, as well decide how student choice may have affected these factors. Table 1 demonstrates the results from the first time the questionnaire was given to the students at the beginning of the term.

Table 1: Results from the first engagement questionnaire

| Behavioural engagement | 1. Never | 2. Rarely | 3. Often | 4. Always |
|--|-----------------|------------------|-----------------|------------------|
| 1. When I'm in class, I work as hard as I can. | | | 8% (1) | 92% (12) |
| 2. I try to answer the questions that the teacher asks in class. | | 8% (1) | 46% (6) | 46% (6) |
| 3. When the teacher speaks, I listen carefully. | | | 38% (5) | 62% (8) |
| 4. When I'm in class, I think about other things. | 62% (8) | 15% (2) | 23% (3) | |
| Emotional engagement | | | | |
| 1. When I'm in class, I feel good. | | | 15% (2) | 85% (11) |
| 2. I feel interested in the class activities. | | | 15% (2) | 85% (11) |
| 3. I feel bored in class. | 46% (6) | 46% (6) | | 8% (1) |
| 4. I enjoy learning English. | | | 15% (2) | 85% (11) |
| Student choice | | | | |
| 1. In class, the teacher decides what we learn. | | | 38% (5) | 62% (8) |
| 2. In class, the teacher decides what activities we do. | | 8% (1) | 46% (6) | 46% (6) |
| 3. The teacher should decide what activities we do in class. | 8% (1) | | 15% (2) | 77% (10) |
| 4. I would like to decide what activities we do in class. | 8% (1) | 31% (4) | 38% (5) | 23% (3) |

The first part of the engagement questionnaire consisted of statements related to behavioural engagement. When analysing the data of the students' behavioural engagement, it was visible that answers to statements 1 and 3 demonstrated that the majority of the students' commitment to learning and their attention in class was high. In statement 4, however, 3 students revealed that they often thought about other things in class, which could have been a consequence of not being involved enough in class activities. Additionally, the responses to statement 2 implicated somewhat lower levels of participation. The variation within the responses to these statements perhaps indicated that the students were less engaged due to a lack of involvement and being able to participate in choice-making in the classroom prior to the research. Perhaps they were afraid that their opinions would not be taken into consideration, or that their answer had no value, since previously the lessons had been more teacher centred and they had not been systematically practising procedural autonomy support in the classroom.

The second section of the questionnaire, shown in Table 1, regarded the students' emotional engagement in class. Answers to statements 1, 2 and 4 about the students' emotional engagement showed that the majority of the students' emotional response to the lessons was always positive. Nonetheless, statement 3 had some conflicting results, since the answers showed that about half of the students got bored "Rarely", although the majority also answered that they were interested in class activities. One student even answered that he/she "Always" felt bored in class, which contradicted the fact that the same student answered that he/she were "Always" interested in activities, which should be taken into account when considering the reliability of the responses. This initial high emotional engagement of the students demonstrated that even though a change in the students' level of engagement was predicted at the beginning of the research, it would most likely not be drastic, as their attitudes were already largely positive from the outset.

In the last section of the questionnaire there were four statements about classroom choice, and it was clarified orally that they were related to the students experience in English classes prior to the research, either with the current teacher or previous teachers. The results, represented in Table 1, indicated that most students thought that until then, the teacher had always decided what to learn in class, as opposed to the teacher choosing what activities to do in class, which received an equal amount of "Often" and "Always" responses, in addition to 1 "Rarely". The two similar statements were presented to ensure that the students understood the difference between a teacher deciding the content of what they are learning and how the content is executed through activities. However, the results showed that the fact that the teacher explained what the research in the classroom would consist of beforehand may have influenced the students' responses. Since they were already aware that they would be participating in choosing activities, they may have answered according to this knowledge, rather than based on their previous experience.

In response to the third statement, the majority of students agreed that the teacher should "Always" decide what activities to do in class, perhaps indicating that they were accustomed to teacher centred learning to the extent that they could not conceive anyone else than the teacher having the authority to choose classroom

activities. In statement 3 there was one exception of “Never”, however, which is also unreliable because the same student answered that the teacher should “Never” decide what activities to do. Furthermore, the results for statement 3 in addition to the mixed results for statement 4, which was explained to the students as referring to how much they would like to be involved in deciding what activities to do in class in the future, may demonstrate that the students did not yet know what to expect since they were still unaware of how student choice would work in the classroom and therefore, uncertain whether they would enjoy it at this time.

2.3.1.2. Results from the second engagement questionnaire

The same questionnaire was given to the students again at the end of the term, after autonomy support had taken place in the classroom. It was then possible to compare the outcome with the responses from the first questionnaire, and to discover some differing results, which are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Results from the second engagement questionnaire

| Behavioural engagement | 1. Never | 2. Rarely | 3. Often | 4. Always |
|--|-----------------|------------------|-----------------|------------------|
| 1. When I'm in class, I work as hard as I can. | | | 8% (1) | 92% (12) |
| 2. I try to answer the questions that the teacher asks in class. | | 8% (1) | 31% (4) | 61% (8) |
| 3. When the teacher speaks, I listen carefully. | | | 23% (3) | 77% (10) |
| 4. When I'm in class, I think about other things. | 46% (6) | 54% (7) | | |
| Emotional engagement | | | | |
| 1. When I'm in class, I feel good. | | | 15% (2) | 85% (11) |
| 2. I feel interested in the class activities. | | | 15% (2) | 85% (11) |
| 3. I feel bored in class. | 62% (8) | 23% (3) | | 15% (2) |
| 4. I enjoy learning English. | | | 15% (2) | 85% (11) |
| Student choice | | | | |
| 1. In class, the teacher decides what we learn. | | 8% (1) | 54% (7) | 38% (5) |
| 2. In class, the teacher decides what activities we do. | 23% (3) | 8% (1) | 38% (5) | 31% (4) |
| 3. The teacher should decide what activities we do in class. | (8%) 1 | 38,5% (5) | 15% (2) | 38,5% (5) |
| 4. I would like to decide what activities we do in class. | 31% (4) | 31% (4) | 23% (3) | 15% (2) |

In the behavioural engagement part of the questionnaire it is possible to see some differences in comparison to the first questionnaire. The only statement with the same results was the first one, whereas statements 2, 3 and 4 revealed higher levels of behavioural engagement in the second questionnaire. Statement 2 had 8 “Always” responses, which is two more than in the first one, perhaps due to the inclusion of students in decision-making over the course of the term, demonstrating that it made them more participative in class. In the second questionnaire, statement 3 also had two more “Always” responses, and contrary to the first questionnaire, no student chose “Often” for statement 4, only “Rarely” or “Never”, possibly indicating that the students had become less distracted in class while being more involved in choosing the activities. These ideas will be further developed in section 2.3.3. discussing the findings from the teacher’s journal.

It is also evident in Table 2 that the second questionnaire did not show as great a difference in the emotional engagement of students as it did in their behavioural engagement, since they already demonstrated very positive attitudes at the beginning of the term. In fact, the answers for statements 1, 2 and 4 were exactly the same in both the first and second questionnaires given to the students. The only dissimilarity was in statement 3, where two more students claimed to “Never” feel bored in class in the second questionnaire, although there was one more “Always” response to the same question. However, similar to the first questionnaire, the same students who chose “Always” for statement 2 also chose “Always” for statements 1, 2 and 4, making their response unreliable. Nonetheless, these results indicate that a larger number of students felt more interested in the lessons after joint decision-making had taken place.

Finally, the students’ responses related to classroom choice, demonstrated in Table 2, are important to analyse. The findings that can be made by comparing the responses related to classroom choice are perhaps the most interesting. According to the answers of the first two statements in the second questionnaire, fewer students clearly agreed that the teacher “Always” decided what to learn and what activities to do in class, as was expected at the beginning of the research. This showed that the students were somewhat aware of their increased autonomy after the first questionnaire, since they had been able to practice joint decision-making in the classroom. However, the

majority still voted that the teacher either often or always chose the activities. Moreover, the responses to the third and fourth statements were rather surprising. Although 38.5% of the students replied that the teacher should “Rarely” decide what activities to do in class in comparison to none of them choosing that option in the first questionnaire, the same number of students also said that the teacher should always choose. In the last statement, more students also said that they would “Never” like to decide what activities to do in class, which was contrary to the predicted results.

A possible explanation for this may be that the students never considered themselves as choosing activities specifically, but rather as choosing the medium of the activities. This could have been true, as it was the teacher who ultimately chose how the activity would be carried out, although the students were able to choose what kind of activity they would do. Therefore, the wording of the statements may have affected their responses. Potential reasons for these results will also be discussed in more detail in section 2.3.3., which includes some of the students’ own explanations about why they answered the questionnaire a certain way as documented in the teacher’s journal.

2.3.1.3. Conclusions from the questionnaires

As was evident in the first questionnaire, the students gave positive responses to everything to begin with, as a result of which, the discrepancies between the two questionnaires were not extreme. Nevertheless, it is apparent that there were greater differences in the behavioural engagement than the students’ emotional engagement, which allows a conclusion to be formed that involving the students in decision-making in the classroom may have been a reason for the increase in their engaged behaviour.

Furthermore, differences were found between the last sections of both questionnaires, representing a possible shift of autonomy to the students and the correlation between this and their behavioural, and to some extent emotional, engagement. Lastly, although the increase of student choice seems to have promoted their engagement, the responses to the last two statements in the second questionnaire indicated that they may prefer not to participate in student choice. Section 2.3.3, however, will discuss the findings from the teacher’s journal, where students expressed

that they would only like to decide what activities to do in class if they were able to do so together as a group.

2.3.2. Observation grid results

In order to compare the findings from the student engagement observation grids, I gathered the average results of 5 observations made while the students were working on activities chosen by the teacher and 5 observations made while students were doing activities that they were involved in choosing. These values are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Observation grid results

| | On-Task Initiative | On-Task Working | On-Task Passive | Off-Task Initiative | Off-Task Working | Off-Task Passive |
|--|--------------------|-----------------|-----------------|---------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Student engagement during activities chosen by teacher on average | 21.5% | 22.2% | 22.7% | 9.3% | 10.4% | 13.9% |
| Student engagement during activities chosen by students on average | 25.6% | 26.3% | 20.3% | 7% | 9.2% | 11.6% |

It is visible in Table 3 that on average a much larger percentage of the class exhibited on-task behaviour than off-task behaviour during activities chosen by the teacher. This proves, once again, that the students' level of behavioural engagement in the classroom was overall positive to begin with. The largest percentage of students, although by only 0.5% percent, were "On-task Passive" during teacher chosen activities, which may be connected to their lack of involvement in choosing the activity that they were doing at the time. As mentioned in section 2.2.3 along with descriptions of the other categories, "On-task Passive" behaviour includes passively listening and following what the teacher is doing for example, rather than actively contributing to the class by raising their hand and speaking (Skinner et al., 2009, p. 503).

When compared to the values established during activities chosen by the teacher, it is possible to see a pattern of difference in the results. Firstly, and similar to the findings in the questionnaires, it is possible to observe that a higher percentage of students showed initiative to participate during the activities that they had helped to choose, whereas a smaller percentage displayed passive behaviour, which is

demonstrated by values in “On-task Initiative”, representing the students’ participative behaviour by taking the initiative to raise their hands and volunteer, for example (Skinner et al., 2009, p. 503). This may be yet another piece of evidence that involving the students in decision-making plays a role in their participation and thus, behavioural engagement in class. In addition, “On-task Working”, such as working on activities and answering questions (Skinner et al., 2009, p. 503), was represented by the highest percentage of the students, 26.3%. Furthermore, on average, off-task behaviour also decreased during activities that the students were involved in choosing.

Overall, the results in both cases confirm that there was visibly more on-task than off-task behaviour in the classroom, although the differences between the two were not significant, likely as a consequence of the overall high engagement levels of the students regardless of the activity in question. These results could also suggest that even though an activity may not have been chosen by them, it may have still been engaging for other reasons, such as its format, the materials used or the group dynamic, as engagement was always a teaching goal, whether an activity was chosen by the teacher or students. It is possible, however, to discover a pattern emerging, taking into account both the observation grids and questionnaires, where the students’ participation in particular increased to a certain extent along with student choice, where the students took part in making decisions about what type of activities would be used to learn a topic. In order to form a final conclusion, however, it is worth considering the observations written in the teacher’s journal, which will be reflected on in the following section.

2.3.3. Teacher’s journal results

Although the focus of this research was on how student choice affects engagement, it is inevitable that other factors also influence the outcome of the results. Therefore, a teacher’s journal was used for any additional observations during the lessons, related to the students’ engagement and any elements that seemed significant for the research. As a result, a discovery was made that one of the other major elements that influenced the student engagement seemed to be the students’ dynamic with their partners as well as their own learning abilities, which indicates that joint-decision making affects engagement only to a certain extent before other factors come into play.

As an example of individual factors affecting engagement, a quote from the teacher's journal explains, "[Student] tried to help [other student] when working as a pair, but got desperate and demotivated to work" 14/11/2019. Thus, when working in pairs, if one of the partners had a lower proficiency in English and demonstrated more passivity while working, it would often make the other partner frustrated and disrupt their on-task behaviour. Another example of how the dynamic between partners could affect their engagement was expressed in the teachers journal as follows, "[Student name] was distracting [student name] during both activities in the lesson, so that they could not focus. At one point they even started talking about Harry Potter in Portuguese, which was completely unrelated to the topic" 24/10/2019. In situations such as this, the dynamic could be changed by switching partners or working in larger groups, for example, so that one student would not always be in the same situation alone, feeling disengaged. The majority of the time, however, students stayed with the same partners that were sitting next to them as decided by the seating arrangement of their classroom teacher. Furthermore, the effects of group or pair work on engagement were visible in both activities chosen by the students as well as the activities chosen solely by the teacher, making the impact of joint-decision making on student engagement perhaps less notable in comparison.

In both types of activities it also became evident that some of the students required continuous assistance and monitoring and found it difficult to follow the rhythm of the class, such as one of the students with special educational needs who, according to the teacher's journal, "...was only engaged when guided to work and constantly helped by the teacher" 14/11/2019. This was in contrast, however, to the students who had a higher proficiency in English and were observed as "very engaged" in the activities, as was written in the teacher's journal on more than one occasion for the same group of students.

I could tell that the four students sitting in the corner, [Names], were very motivated to ask and answer each other's questions during the game. I could see in their posture and faces that they were enjoying it! I didn't need to constantly supervise them, because they were autonomous in always initiating the next question and remained on-task throughout the activity. 5/11/2019

This indicates that the way joint decision-making affects student engagement may also be different for students of varying levels of proficiency and learning backgrounds, since their ability to apply themselves and remain engaged throughout the lesson may differ overall, regardless of whether an activity is chosen by the students or teacher.

Nonetheless, observations related directly to student choice were also able to be made, and it would be consistently visible that the students were extremely excited to participate in choosing a new activity from the choice board. This is evident in the requests of many students recorded in the teacher's journal, such as: "Teacher Vanessa, can we please use the choice board today?" 15/10/2019, "Teacher Vanessa, when are we going to use the choice board? I want to use it!" 1/10/2019 and "I really like using the choice board" 18/11/2019. The journal also recorded that "The students took initiative when choosing and carrying out the activities chosen by them. At the beginning of the lesson, [Name] asked "Are we going to do the play today?" 24/10/2019 and at another time a student asked, "We chose to play a game last week, are we going to do it now?" 3/10/2019. Therefore, it is evident that the students showed initiative to choose the activities themselves as well as execute them, although the observation grid results indicated similar levels of emotional and behavioural engagement in both activities they had and had not chosen, which was most likely due to the majority of the students' initial high level of engagement regardless of the activity, as well as the variety of engaging activities made by the teacher.

Another display of an increase in the students' autonomy was evident when they would always choose a different activity from the previous one chosen from the choice board without any suggestion from the teacher. The teacher's journal documented these instances, by writing "Today when we were using the choice board, [Name] suggested that since we chose to play a game last week, we should choose a different activity this week" 8/10/2019, and at another quote from the teacher's journal recorded a student saying, "Let's try all the different activities!" 10/10/2019. As a consequence, none of the activities from the choice board were repeated, and the class was able to try each one of them once by the end of the term.

Thus, the teacher's journal also demonstrates that the students were highly participative during moments related to decision-making, implying that student choice

promoted their behavioural engagement in the English foreign language classroom. Moreover, high levels of engagement may have been even more evident when choosing activities than during the activities themselves, which also indicates how the students valued their increased autonomy. This is evident when comparing the teacher's journal quotes related to moments where procedural autonomy was taking place to some of the extracts where the students were executing the activities that they had chosen, such as "Most of the students were engaged during the game, but it seems that they had almost forgotten that they had helped to choose the activity, even though they were very excited while choosing it in the last lesson" 11/11/2019, and "At the beginning of the lesson [student name] was really excited to do the play (the activity that they had chosen), and although he was engaged during the activity, he seemed even more enthusiastic about the idea that he had been able to choose it at the start" 18/11/2019.

Their enthusiasm during the decision-making moments may have been linked to the colourful visuals of the choice board which they enjoyed looking at every time it was brought out, their lack of being able to make such choices in the past and therefore it was new and exciting, or their eagerness to do it as a group, for example. Furthermore, the students may have had a certain idea of exactly what kind of activity they wanted when choosing "game" from the choice board, for example, but when the teacher carried out the activity, it was not what they expected, which is why they were less engaged during the activity itself. Consequently, all aspects and stages of the joint-decision making process should be taken into account when analysing its impact on student engagement.

Emotional engagement, on the other hand, was more difficult to measure. However, it was informally addressed at the beginning of each lesson, when the students had to show how they felt with the number of fingers held up according to a feelings chart. This exercise indicated that the majority of the students felt happy or excited, or in their own words recorded in the teacher's journal "Super, super, SUPER excited!" 7/11/2020 to start the lesson. Another excerpt from the teacher's journal also shows how the students often felt after class: "At the end of the lesson, three students came up to me to say how they really enjoyed the lesson and doing the singing activity that they had been able to choose themselves" 31/10/2019. Therefore, the students'

general level of emotional engagement was seemingly high even before the class activities had started, implying similar levels of engagement during moments both related to student choice and not.

To understand some of the results of the questionnaires and observation grids, it is also important to take note of the students' own accounts of their emotional engagement as reflected in the teacher's journal, such as the following extract:

After the students had completed questionnaires, I asked them why some had answered that they would "Never" like to decide what activities we do in class since after all, most signs pointed to them enjoying it. Most of the children explained that during the process of making joint decisions in the classroom, they learned that they prefer making choices together as a group by voting, which was the method that we use in the classroom, rather than being the only ones choosing for the whole class by themselves, which is how some of them had interpreted the statement in the questionnaire. The students clarified that they wanted to include everyone and work as a team instead of making selfish choices, which was an unexpected but positive outcome from the experience. 5/12/2019

Thus, many of the students' interpretation of the last statement changed after the first questionnaire, since it was only after they had experienced a democratic way of making choices together that they understood it differently. When asked whether they interpreted it this way in the first questionnaire, the teacher's journal recorded the following answers, for example, "No, because I didn't know then (in the first questionnaire) that I could make choices as a group", and "I thought then (in the first questionnaire) that it meant just me, but now I want to continue making decisions together" 5/12/2019. Moreover, even some of the students who had not interpreted the statement differently voted that they would like to continue choosing activities in the future either often or always, as the teachers journal recorded, "All of the students put their hands up when asked if they would like to keep choosing activities in the future either sometimes or always in class" 5/12/2019.

Furthermore, some of the results of the second questionnaire suggested an increase in the students' participation in class after student choice had taken place, and when asked whether the students felt this was the case, the response recorded was, "[5

student names] expressed that because they had more freedom to choose what types of activities to do in class, they felt more involved and happy that they could work as a team to do so. [Name] even said that it made him feel more confident to participate in class. The rest of the students agreed with these feelings” 5/12/2019. Although this demonstrates that the students seemed to have good attitudes and feelings related to student choice and the English classes in general, the data collected of the students’ behavioural engagement is more reliable, since it may be problematic to trust the children’s own description of their feelings. It is also important to note that the descriptive nature of the teacher’s journal and the quotes gathered provides a different and more detailed perspective than the quantitative observational data collected from the observation grids, which lacks the students’ perspective to explain why certain results may have occurred.

2.4. Discussion and conclusion

In response to the research question ““How does joint decision-making affect student engagement in the primary foreign language classroom?” this section will outline the emerging pattern from the results of the engagement questionnaires, observation grids and teacher’s journal. Although there were not many notable contrasts in the data collected, according to all three research tools, higher levels of participation were evident when student choice took place and thereafter. Thus, it is possible that allowing the students autonomy to be involved in decisions related to classroom activities can promote their behavioural engagement more than their emotional engagement, although to some extent it encourages both. Reasons for this may have been that behavioural engagement was more observable than emotional engagement, and the fact that the students were initially more highly emotionally engaged than behaviourally engaged, thus not demonstrating great changes.

2.4.1. *Implications of the study*

Although it may have been slight, behavioural engagement increased overall and less off-task behaviour and negative attitudes in the students were related to student choice, which in this case means when they were involved in making decisions about what

activities to do in class. Although emotional engagement was more difficult to measure, both due to the unreliability of some of the results in the questionnaires and not knowing how the students were truly feeling while observing them or the truthfulness of their responses when asked about their feelings, it can also be deduced that the children were highly emotionally involved when they were given the freedom of choice from the results of the teacher's journal. Nonetheless, any conclusive evidence of this is hard to find and could be an idea for further research.

Additionally, the mixed results in relation to student autonomy were unexpected. Although their behavioural engagement may have increased, the majority of the students revealed that they preferred not to decide what activities to do in class by themselves in the second questionnaire. This case in itself, however, proves how important it is to acknowledge the voice of the children and create a student-centred classroom by letting them explain themselves, as when questioned about their choices, they explained that they had learned the importance of teamwork and that they would like to choose the activities together as a class, not by themselves. Therefore, a conclusion can also be made that the students would like to continue to be involved in decision-making in the classroom in the future, as presented in the last statement of the questionnaire and asked orally, as long as it is done in a democratic manner.

2.4.2. Comparison to previous studies

Comparable to the study conducted by Skinner et al. (2009), my research aimed to find a correlation between the behavioural and emotional engagement of students, but with a third factor of influence, student choice, which was expected to affect the relationship between these indicators. This was important in order to understand whether a change in the students' levels of engagement may have been due to increased learner autonomy through student choice or other factors. Thus, Näkk and Timoštšuk's (2017) study involving both student engagement and autonomy support is also comparable, although for the purposes of this short action research project, I eliminated the aspect of cognitive engagement and focused on the emotional and behavioural engagement of the students. Furthermore, my study was specifically centered on procedural autonomy support in the form of student choice, as opposed to autonomy support in general. Moreover, I used similar methods to Näkk and Timoštšuk (2017) and Skinner et al. (2009)

to collect data, which were an engagement questionnaire and classroom observation. Their methods as well as the results of their research were useful for this study, as both studies revealed the significance of various factors affecting student engagement, which will be discussed in the following subsection.

2.4.3. Limitations of the study

The results of this research proved that it is possible to use student choice in the classroom in an unproblematic way, although I also understand that I had a class with fewer than the average number of students with an overall calm nature, resulting in an ideal target group. In other circumstances, however, where classes are larger and students come from a wider range of socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds, the use of procedural autonomy support through democratic class vote may not be as simple, and may cause difficulties such as disagreements and inequality in the classroom. Therefore, alternative methods of autonomy support, such as organizational and cognitive autonomy support as suggested by Stefanou et al. (2004) are worth exploring.

The size of the class could also be problematic regarding the results. Since the class consisted of only 13 students, the statistics cannot directly be applied to students in general, and there may be great variance if the same research was carried out under different circumstances. In addition to the size of the class, its very nature must also be taken into account as an influence on the results, since the majority of the students were very well-behaved and calm. Therefore, as mentioned throughout the results, there was no considerable contrast in their comparison, because since the beginning the students seemed highly behaviourally and emotionally engaged, which according to Näkk and Timoštšuk (2017), is typical in primary school in comparison to secondary school.

Another point to take into account is that although attempting to be objective, the researcher will always inevitably bring a somewhat subjective viewpoint to their observations as well as make misjudgements, and thus, the information cannot be considered entirely factual. Moreover, the questionnaires proved to have contradicting data, which also puts into question the trustworthiness of the children's answers, who may have misunderstood the statements or not have been aware of how they feel. Additionally, a possible issue related to the reliability of results of student engagement

in the research is the entity, student choice, by which they are measured. Ultimately, it is difficult to know whether student autonomy was the main reason behind the findings of the research. As Näkk and Timoštšuk (2017) and Skinner et al. (2009) discovered, the impact of various external and internal factors must be considered when studying student engagement. In this study, it was apparent that group dynamics and different levels of competence were implicated in the quality of student engagement. It should also be taken into account, as Näkk and Timoštšuk (2017) and Skinner et al. (2009) suggested, that there are many ways of engaging students and autonomy support may only be one among them.

Thus, it is important to consider these possible issues when reviewing the results of the research. However, it is also worth noting that the results of this research may not only be appropriate for the English foreign language classroom, but can also be applied in other primary contexts. Furthermore, these methods can also be useful with younger and older children, as autonomy and engagement are important for learning across all ages and subjects, and as teachers it is our responsibility to equip our students with the tools necessary to succeed.

2.4.4. Further research

The results of this study imply that student choice should be incorporated in the primary foreign language classroom. Giving the students freedom to choose how to carry out their activities is a simple start to this, since it gives them autonomy but simultaneously allows the teacher to keep control over the necessary learning materials and the curriculum. Not only does joint decision-making make the students more autonomous, it promotes their behavioural engagement and further research could be carried out on how it can be used to encourage them to speak more English during class discussions about choices, for example.

Another suggestion for further research would be to examine the best way to incorporate student choice in the classroom. Since my action research only explored one manner of doing it, which was through the use of a choice board and democratic voting in class, it may be worth exploring other methods of joint decision-making. Some alternative ways of doing this could be by voting anonymously instead of by a show of

hands, or by choosing one child each time to be in charge of a certain decision. Furthermore, instead of making decisions about activities together, students could help choosing the classroom rules or to some extent the content of what they learn, such as grammar or vocabulary, for example. Nonetheless, this action research can serve a foundation for any future research that could possibly develop the ideas provided here.

2.4.5. Learnings from the research

To conclude, in the introduction to this research I stated that for me it was important to create a close relationship with students by involving them more in the classroom, and this way I could also hopefully promote their engagement. As a result of this research, I discovered that the more open and inclusive I was with my students, the more they also opened up to me, which made them more engaged. Therefore, not only has this research encouraged me to gain more knowledge about the topic, but as a teacher trainee it has also motivated me to develop my classroom into an increasingly engaging and student-centered environment.

The outcome of the research contributed to my understanding of children's ability to be more autonomous and thoughtful than perhaps initially expected, which is another reason why primary students should be given more opportunities and responsibility to participate in making decisions in the classroom. The students also benefitted from the research by learning procedural autonomy, and that it is possible for them to be more involved in making choices about their own learning, which can ultimately affect their engagement positively. Therefore, I will continue to apply the knowledge provided by this research in my everyday teaching, and I hope it helps other teachers do the same.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Engagement questionnaire

|  Engagement in English class / Grau de envolvimento nas aulas de Inglês  | |
|---|---|
| Instructions / Instruções: Please cross the number that best represents your situation. <i>Por favor, cruza o número que melhor representa a tua situação.</i> | 1 = Never / Nunca 2 = Rarely / Poucas vezes 3 = Often / Muitas vezes 4 = Always / Sempre |
| | |
| When I'm in class, I work as hard as I can. <i>Quando estou nas aulas, trabalho o melhor que posso.</i> | <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3 <input type="radio"/> 4 |
| I try to answer the questions that the teacher asks in class. <i>Tento responder às perguntas que a professora coloca à turma.</i> | <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3 <input type="radio"/> 4 |
| When the teacher speaks, I listen carefully. <i>Quando a professora fala, ouço com atenção.</i> | <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3 <input type="radio"/> 4 |
| When I'm in class, I think about other things. <i>Quando estou nas aulas, penso noutras coisas.</i> | <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3 <input type="radio"/> 4 |
| | |
| When I'm in class, I feel good. <i>Quando estou nas aulas, sinto-me bem.</i> | <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3 <input type="radio"/> 4 |
| I feel interested in the class activities. <i>Sinto-me interessado/a nas atividades das aulas.</i> | <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3 <input type="radio"/> 4 |
| I feel bored in class. <i>Sinto-me aborrecido/a nas aulas.</i> | <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3 <input type="radio"/> 4 |
| I enjoy learning English. <i>Gosto de aprender Inglês.</i> | <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3 <input type="radio"/> 4 |
| | |
| In class, the teacher decides what we learn. <i>Nas aulas, a professora decide o que aprendemos.</i> | <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3 <input type="radio"/> 4 |
| In class, the teacher decides what activities we do. <i>Nas aulas, a professora decide que atividades fazemos.</i> | <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3 <input type="radio"/> 4 |
| The teacher should decide what activities we do in class. <i>A professora é quem deve decidir que atividades fazemos nas aulas.</i> | <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3 <input type="radio"/> 4 |
| I would like to decide what activities we do in class. <i>Gostaria de decidir que atividades fazemos nas aulas.</i> | <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3 <input type="radio"/> 4 |
| | |

Appendix B: Observation grid

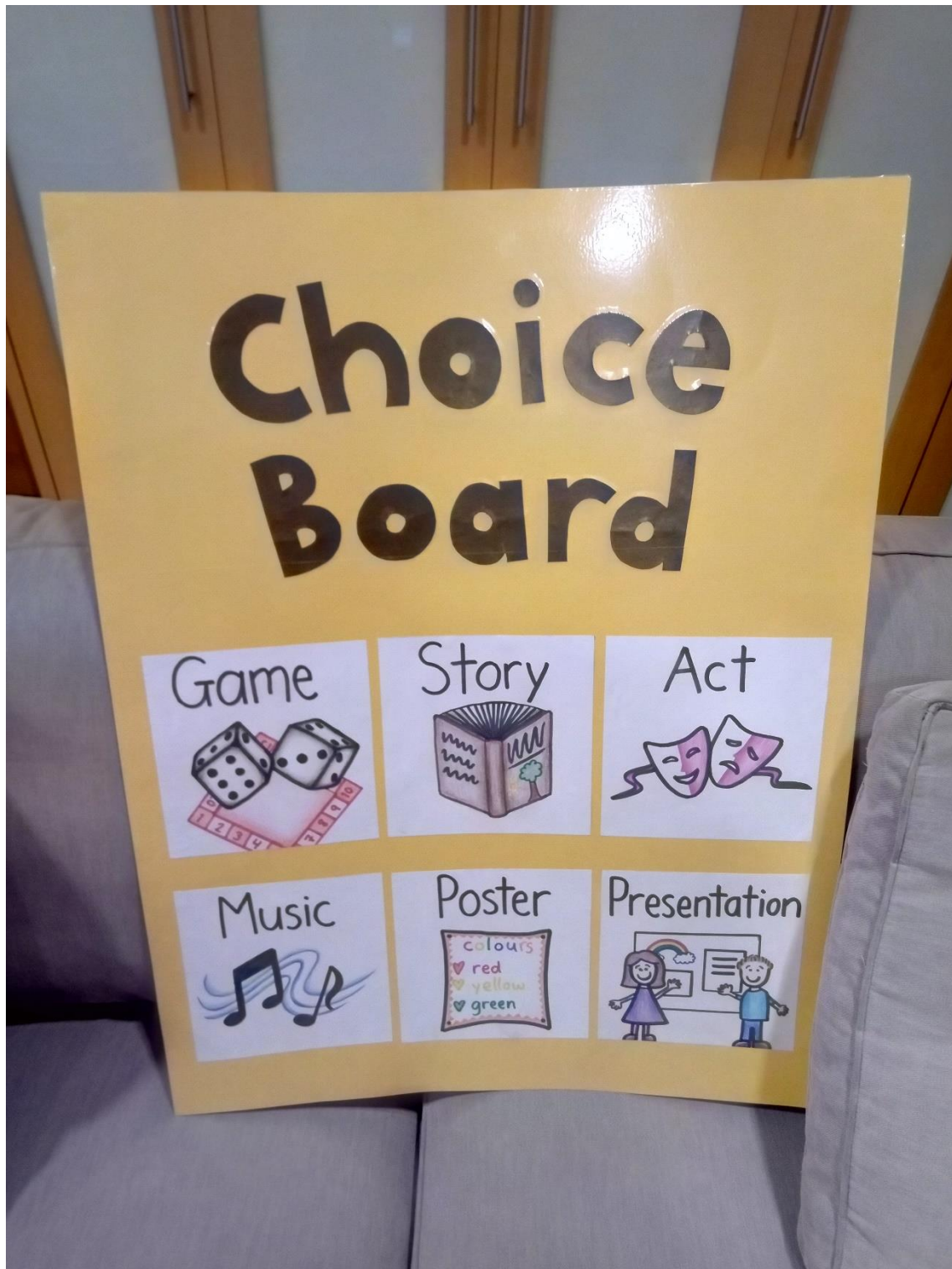
Student engagement observation grid

| Students (according to groups) | On-Task Initiative | On-Task Working | On-Task Passive | Off-Task Initiative | Off-task Working | Off-Task Passive |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|--------------------|------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Name | | | | | | |
| Name | | | | | | |
| Name | | | | | | |
| Name | | | | | | |
| Name | | | | | | |
| Name | | | | | | |
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| Name | | | | | | |
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| Name | | | | | | |
| Name | | | | | | |
| Name | | | | | | |
| Name | | | | | | |
| Name | | | | | | |

“On-Task Active Initiative (e.g., a child contributed to a lesson on her own initiative, raised his hand, or volunteered to go to the board), On-Task Working (e.g., reading, working on a problem, continuing an activity, answering a question), and On-Task Passive (e.g., listening to the teacher or a classmate making an on-task contribution), Off-Task Initiative (e.g., disrupting a classmate or interrupting the teacher with a nonacademic issue), Off-Task Working (e.g., building paper airplanes, participating in a classmate’s active off-task behavior), and Off-Task Passive Behavior (e.g., daydreaming or listening to a classmate’s off-task contribution)”.

Other observations (comments)

| | |
|------|--|
| Name | |
| Name | |
| Name | |
| Name | |
| Name | |
| Name | |
| Name | |
| Name | |
| Name | |
| Name | |
| Name | |
| Name | |
| Name | |
| Name | |



Appendix D: Student consent letter

Olá caros estudantes!



O meu nome é Vanessa e estou muito contente por ser a vossa "professora-aluna" de Inglês este ano! Temos um ótimo outono pela frente.

Para tornar a aprendizagem de Inglês ainda mais divertida, vou realizar um trabalho que inclui o vosso envolvimento nas escolhas do que fazemos.

Juntos, podemos escolher atividades diferentes para fazer cada semana, como jogar um jogo, cantar uma música ou ler uma história!

Eu adorava que todos vocês participassem nesta pesquisa. Se decidirem fazê-lo, poderão preencher um questionário interessante, mas não se preocupem, ninguém saberá quem escreveu!

Tanto a Paula como eu estaremos a observar e a fazer algumas anotações durante as aulas. Mas uma vez, não se preocupem, ninguém saberá sobre quem são as anotações!

Podes escolher não participar ou podes, a qualquer momento, decidir não querer participar mais, mas eu gostava muito que me acompanhasses nesta aventura até ao fim! O teu encarregado de educação foi informado deste trabalho e deu autorização para participares.

Mal posso esperar para começarmos esta aventura juntos! Vamos começar um período em que todos poderemos fazer escolhas e juntos, desenhar a nossa própria aprendizagem. Se tiverem alguma dúvida, podem perguntar-me a mim ou à professora Paula.

Se decidirem participar, poderão fazer escolhas acerca de que atividades divertidas vamos fazer e participar nelas!



Nome: _____

Põe uma cruz em apenas uma das caixas:

Sim, quero participar no projeto da teacher Vanessa ☐



Não, não quero participar no projeto da teacher Vanessa ☐



Appendix E: Parent consent letter

Lisboa 15 de setembro de 2019

Vanessa Valkama
Aluna de Mestrado
Universidade Nova de Lisboa

Caros Pais e Encarregados de Educação,

O meu nome é Vanessa Valkama, e é com muito gosto que irei estagiar com o seu educando durante o 1º período deste ano letivo. Estou a fazer um mestrado em Ensino de Inglês no 1º Ciclo, na Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas na Universidade Nova de Lisboa. O mestrado implica que durante o estágio faça um pequeno projeto de investigação, que será incluído no meu relatório final. O meu trabalho intitula-se "Joint decisions promoting student engagement in the primary foreign language classroom".

Este estudo tem como objetivo perceber como envolver mais os alunos na durante as aulas de inglês, envolvendo-os nos processos de tomada de decisão. Estudos anteriores já mostraram que o envolvimento dos alunos está diretamente relacionado ao sucesso académico. Deste modo, o resultado deste estudo fornecerá, aos professores, o conhecimento para usar a escolha conjunta como uma ferramenta para uma melhor aprendizagem.

Por conseguinte, venho por este meio solicitar a vossa autorização para poder incluir o seu educando neste projeto que vai decorrer entre setembro e dezembro de 2019, durante o meu estágio. Depois de pedida autorização ao seu educando para a/o incluir no meu estudo, a recolha de dados será efetuada mediante o uso de questionários, observações em sala de aula, e excertos do meu diário de professora.

A instituição, todos os seus funcionários e as crianças permanecerão anónimas em qualquer circunstância. Nunca serão tiradas fotografias nem obtidas imagens, nem da instituição nem das crianças. Informo que a qualquer momento o seu educando pode escolher não participar nas atividades, e que as informações obtidas serão referidas no meu relatório final de mestrado e eventualmente em artigos académicos e conferências.

Se tiver questões a colocar, agradeço que me contactem pessoalmente através da professora titular da turma ou de e-mail valkamavanessa@gmail.com. Ficarei muito grata se der autorização para que o seu educando possa participar no meu estudo. Solicito que esta autorização seja assinada e entregue tão brevemente quanto possível.

Vanessa Valkama
Aluna de Mestrado
FCSH, Universidade Nova de Lisboa

Professora Doutora Carolyn Leslie
Supervisora de Estágio
FCSH, Universidade Nova de Lisboa

Eu, _____ Encarregado de Educação de _____ declaro que fui informado(a) dos objectivos do projeto intitulado "Joint decisions promoting student engagement in the primary foreign language classroom", e autorizo o meu educando a participar no estudo.

Data: _____ Assinatura: _____

Appendix F: School director consent letter

Lisboa 15 de setembro de 2019

Vanessa Valkama
Aluna de Mestrado
Universidade Nova de Lisboa

Exma. Sra. Diretora

No âmbito do protocolo estabelecido entre a Universidade Nova de Lisboa e este Agrupamento para realização do meu estágio em Ensino de Inglês no 1º ciclo, solicito a vossa autorização para a realização do projeto de investigação que constitui parte do meu relatório final do mestrado. O trabalho intitula-se "Joint decisions promoting student engagement in the primary foreign language classroom" e irá decorrer entre setembro e dezembro de 2019, durante o meu estágio com a turma 3 da Colégio A Formiguinha com a supervisão da minha professora colaboradora Paula Katchi e supervisora de estágio Carolyn Leslie.

Este estudo tem como objetivo perceber como envolver mais os alunos na durante as aulas de inglês, envolvendo-os nos processos de tomada de decisão. Estudos anteriores já mostraram que o envolvimento dos alunos está diretamente relacionado ao sucesso académico. Deste modo, o resultado deste estudo fornecerá, aos professores, o conhecimento para usar a escolha conjunta como uma ferramenta para uma melhor aprendizagem.

A recolha de dados será efetuada mediante o uso de questionários, observações em sala de aula, e excertos do meu diário de professora. A informação obtida será analisada e utilizada no meu relatório final de mestrado e, eventualmente, em artigos académicos e conferências. Serão igualmente solicitadas autorizações aos alunos e encarregados de educação. A qualquer momento do decorrer da investigação os envolvidos poderão escolher não participar.

A instituição, todos os seus professores, funcionários e as crianças permanecerão anónimas em qualquer circunstância. Nunca serão tiradas fotografias nem obtidas imagens da instituição ou das crianças.

Agradeço desde já a vossa colaboração para proceder à implementação do estudo em causa e manifesto a minha disponibilidade para qualquer esclarecimento através do e-mail valkamavanessa@gmail.com. Solicito, igualmente, que a autorização me seja concedida até ao dia 23 de setembro.

Vanessa Valkama
Aluna de Mestrado
FCSH, Universidade Nova de Lisboa

Professora Doutora Carolyn Leslie
Supervisora de Estágio
FCSH, Universidade Nova de Lisboa

Eu, _____ Diretora do Colégio A Formiguinha declaro que fui informada dos objetivos do projeto "Joint decisions promoting student engagement in the primary foreign language classroom" e autorizo os alunos da turma 3 a participarem no estudo.

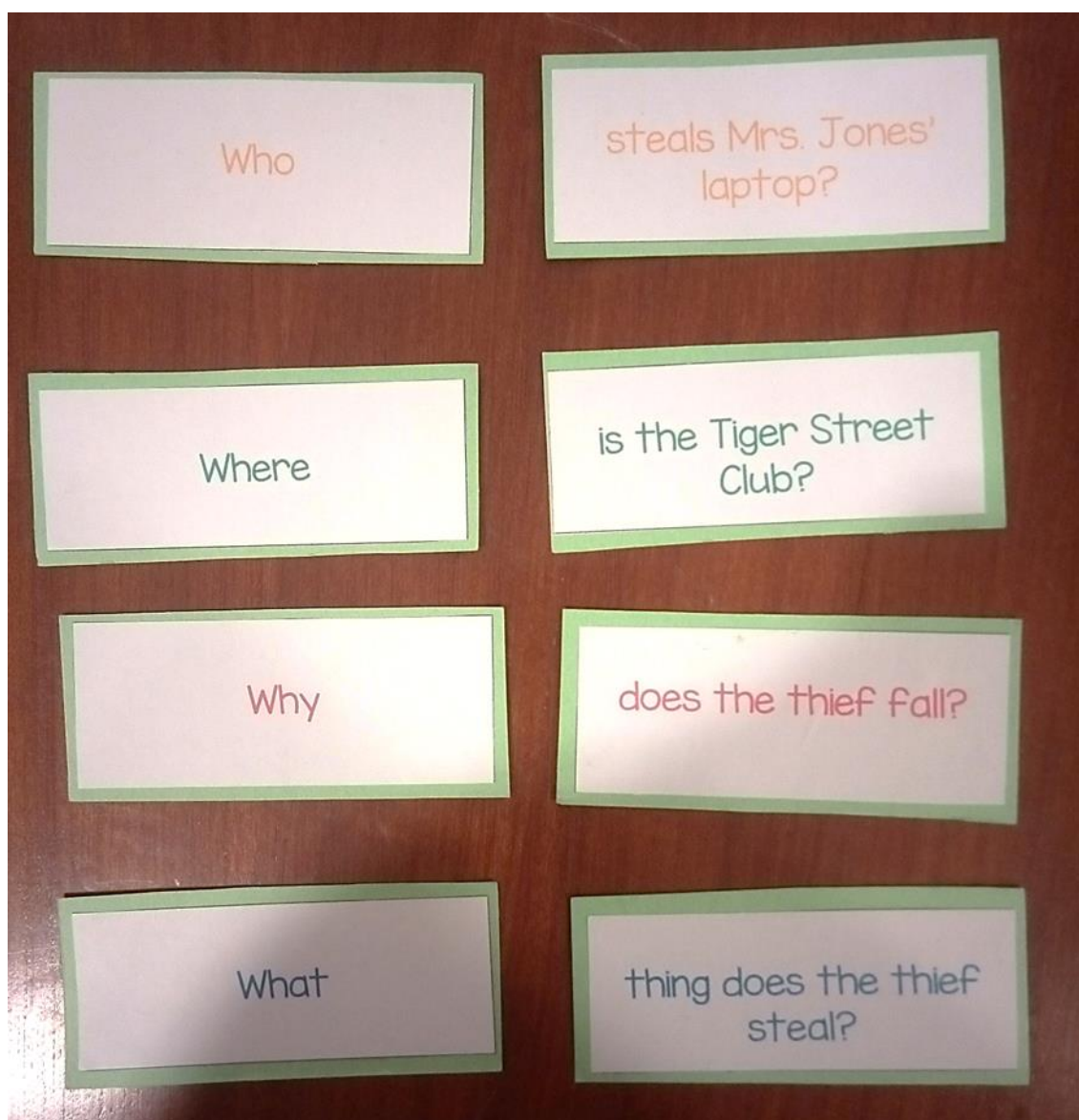
Data: _____

Assinatura: _____

Appendix G: "Story time" chosen by the students (Story cards)



Appendix H: "Game" chosen by the students (Matching game with unit vocabulary)



Appendix I: “Act” chosen by the students (Screenplay)

Name: _____

A Laptop for the Club: Screenplay

Story card 1

Narrator: The Tiger Street Club meet in a shed in Ben’s garden. The children listen to music and play games. One day ...

Ellie: Look at this. It’s a new magazine called *Tiger Team*.

Ben: Let’s write for it.

Nasim: Great idea!

Clare: But we can’t. We haven’t got a computer.

Story card 2

Ben: Hey! Look at Mrs. Jones’s house. Who’s that man?

Ellie: Perhaps he’s a window cleaner.

Clare: Or perhaps he’s a thief!

Nasim: Let’s go find out.

Story card 3

Narrator: The children run to Mrs. Jones’s house.

Clare: Look, the window is open.

Nasim: The man isn’t on a ladder.

Ellie: He’s in the house!

Ben: Oh no!

Story card 4

Narrator: The thief runs away.

Clare: He is a thief! Look! He’s got Mrs. Jones’s laptop.

Ben: He is a thief!

Mrs. Jones: Stop, thief!

Nasim: Give the laptop back.

5 Little Pumpkins Halloween song

One little pumpkin is frowning, frowning
One little pumpkin is frowning, frowning
One little pumpkin is frowning, frowning
One little pumpkin is angry



Two little pumpkins are crying, crying
Two little pumpkins are crying, crying
Two little pumpkins are crying, crying
Two little pumpkins are sad



Three little pumpkins are yawning, yawning
Three little pumpkins are yawning, yawning
Three little pumpkins are yawning, yawning
Three little pumpkins are tired



Four little pumpkins are smiling, smiling
Four little pumpkins are smiling, smiling
Four little pumpkins are smiling, smiling
Four little pumpkins are happy



Five little pumpkins are jumping, jumping
Five little pumpkins are jumping, jumping
Five little pumpkins are jumping, jumping
Five little pumpkins are excited!



Appendix K: "Arts and crafts" chosen by the students (Thanksgiving turkey)

